DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 381 CG 024 869

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TITLE The Job Interview: An Employer Preview.
PUB DATE Mar 93
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (39th, Atlanta, GA, March 24-27, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; *Employee Attitudes; *Employment Interviews; High School Graduates; *Job Applicants; *Personnel Selection; *Questioning Techniques; *Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to evaluate the effects of the job interview on the attitudes of applicants, those who were hired and those who were not, and to offer employers suggestions for the interview process. The potential previewing effects of discriminatory interviewing techniques were also assessed. Questionnaires were sent to 134 individuals who applied for full-time, entry level direct care positions at a large state-operated residential facility for mentally retarded persons in the southeastern United States. Sixty-four of the subjects were hired by the facility, 70 were not hired. Across both groups 59% were female and 58% were black. The findings suggested no significant interaction effects for sex, race, or job status. Although the results demonstrated no significant main effects for sex or race, a main effect for job status was revealed, such that the attitudes of the hired group were significantly higher than those of applicants who were not hired. Higher scores indicated a more positive attitude toward the interview. Although the interview process was rated less favorably by those individuals not hired, that group tended also to rate the interview in a positive direction. The findings suggest that employers need to formulate more effective strategies to deal with interviewer compliance to organizational goals and to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines. (NB)

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The Job Interview: An Employer Preview

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Paper Presented at the 39th Annual Meeting

of the Southeastern Psychological Association

Atlanta, GA

March 24-27, 1993

CG024869

The Job Interview: An Employer Preview

Organizational entry can be approached from two perspectives: the individual's or the organization's (Wanous, 1976, 1980; Feldman, 1976; Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975; Schein, 1978). Further, the entry process can be divided into three major elements (Wanous, 1976): the pre-entry stage (preparation, information gathering, decision to attempt entry, entry decision), the entry stage, (realigning expectations with reality and resolution of conflicts between individual expectations and organizational demands), and the post-entry stage (adaptation, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, withdrawal or commitment to stay). The primary concern of this study was with the proper presentation and previewing of the employer at the pre-entry stage.

Pre-entry begins before the individual comes into contact with the organization. Preparation and training for an occupation or career begins in the early years of the individual's formal education. The individual begins to develop expectations concerning various occupations and careers. These expectations can be realistic but, for the most part, the "ivory tower phenomenon" is at work, i.e., the individual maintains unrealistic expectations concerning the realities of various occupations and careers. Subsequently confirming and disconfirming information may be supplied by schools, friends and relatives, and from materials dispensed by various organizations. Once an individual chooses an occupation, an organization is sought out that would allow them to pursue the chosen direction.

The way the individual finds a particular organization has become an important issue in recent years (Wanous, 1980). Gannon (1971) studied the relationship between sources of referral and stable employment. He found that four sources of referral are related to lower turnover: a) re-employment of former workers, b) hiring individuals referred by high schools, c) hiring individuals referred by present employees, and d) walk-ins. Two sources of referral were identified with higher turnover rates: a) hiring agencies not connected with the employer and b) newspaper advertising. Considering the potential dysfunctional consequences that can

result from the inflated expectations of new employees, Wanous (1980) suggested organizations place more emphasis upon dispensing complete and candid information about life inside the organization, including detailed descriptions of specific job duties and responsibilities. Zaharia and Baumeister (1981) verified the utility of a realistic previewing strategy in a human service setting.

The employment interview as a pre-entry event has long been criticized for a lack of reliability and validity (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Mayfield, 1964; Schmitt, 1976; Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965; Wagner, 1949; Wright, 1969). Continued organizational use of the interview as a selection device is questioned by many organizational scientists.

Carlson, Thayer, Mayfield, & Peterson (1971) point out that most studies reveal that interview decisions are made according to what order negative or positive information is presented. Ulrich and Trumbo (1965) reported similar findings and recommended using a structured interview rather than an unstructured interview. They also suggested that the interview should be seen as a recruiting device or public relations tool by the organization as well as a selection device. In this regard, Schein (1978) has provided a good review of the interview process and its effects on the perceptions of the individual. He stated that the recruitment/selection process is one of the primary bases on which new members form their image of their future employer. Rogers and Sincoff (1978) have similarly suggested that the interviewer becomes the symbol for the company. Although the interviewer represents a sample of one, candidates often place more importance on the assessment of this representative of the organization than on organizational literature. So, while the interview can be criticized as a poor selection device, its use can be justified, and evaluated, on other grounds.

A few studies have attempted to define what interviewees perceived to be a good interview. Odiorne and Hann (1961) reported three dimensions which were identified by interviewees: a) the interviewer as a person, b) the presentation of the interview, and c) the interviewer's presentation of the organization and the job. Interviews were rated as good if the interviewer talked only 50% of the time, seemed interested, was a friendly listener, and avoided

embarrassing the interviewee. Alderfer and McCord (1970) reported that the best interviewer ratings were given when: the applicant perceived interest and concern from the interviewer, the candidate's strengths and limitations were identified, interviewers were younger successful males, and there was a possibility of a high wage. The aspects which most clearly distinguished the worst and best recruiters concerned the candidates' perception of attentiveness to interviewee needs.

What these and other studies have demonstrated is that individuals have strong opinions concerning what is a good and a bad interview and that they do tend to link the interview experience with the organization. It is self-evident that the interview process can have a profound effect upon the potential employee and is a crucial part of the pre-entry previewing process.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of the interview on the attitudes of applicants who were subsequently hired and those who were not hired. Further, given the litigious nature of society today in this regard (Arvey & Campion, 1982) and the federal presence in the form of Equal Employment Opportunity for protected classes, the potential previewing effects of discriminatory interviewing techniques were also assessed.

Method

The subjects in the study consisted of 134 individuals who applied for full-time, entry-level direct care positions between February and June of 1984 at a large state-operated residential facility for mentally retarded persons in the southeastern United States. A total of 64 applicants were hired; 70 were not hired. All applicants in both groups had completed at least high school. Of the 134 individuals contacted by a mailed survey 71 (53%) responded. The respondents were made up of 37 (57%) people who were hired and 34 (48%) people who were not hired. Across both groups of respondents 59% were female and 58% were black. The age of both groups ranged between 22 and 25 years old. All 71 respondents resided in small rural communities near the employer. There were no significant demographic differences between

the two respondent groups.

The survey consisted of three sections. The first was a 28-item Likert scale constructed for the purpose of assessing the respondents' overall attitude towards the interview. The items were suggested by the results from studies by Alderfer and McCord (1970), Odiorne and Hann (1961), and Schmitt and Coyle (1976) and demonstrated internal consistency reliability (alpha = .90).

The second section contained a group of questions suggested by the state's Equal Opportunity Employment Commission as possible problems vis-a-vis discriminatory selection techniques (not job related, e.g., "are you married?"). The respondents were asked to identify any question from this list that had been asked during the interview.

The third section contained a list of the most frequently mentioned sources of job information from which the applicant could have learned about the job opening. The respondents were asked to identify the source or sources from which they obtained information about the job opening. They were also asked to identify sources they felt provided the most reliable pre-interview information concerning the job.

Survey questionnaires were mailed in July of 1984 with a cover letter from staff in the Psychology Department at a local university and included stamped pre-addressed return envelopes. Two weeks after the questionnaires were mailed a reminder notice was sent to each potential respondent.

Results

Each respondent questionnaire was given an "attitude toward interview score" by summing responses to the 5-point 28-item scale. Higher scores indicated a more positive attitude toward the interview. The results of an analysis of variance of attitude scores suggested no significant interaction effects for sex, race or job status. Although the results demonstrated no significant main effects for Sex or Race, a main effect for Job Status was revealed; suggesting that the attitudes of the hired group ($\underline{M}$ = 114.94) were significantly higher than those of the

applicants who were not hired ($\underline{M}$ = 102.23), $\underline{F}_{(1,63)}$= 13.97, $\underline{p}$<.01).

An overall correlation was obtained ($\underline{r}$ = .49, $\underline{r}^2$ = .24) in order to establish an estimate of the amount of variance in interview attitude due to job status. The fifteen individual items correlating siginficantly with job status are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The survey section dealing with non-job related interview questions showed that the 64 hired applicants were asked 92 questions and the 70 non-hired applicants were asked 121 questions requesting information with the potential of being used to discriminate unfairly. Table 2 reports the distribution of discriminatory questions across various demographic groups. Although the trends are perhaps interesting, no significant differences, using Chi Square, were found for Race or Sex ($\underline{p}$ > .05). Table 3 shows the number of times respondents were asked each question.

Insert Table 2 and 3 about here

The third section of the survey solicited the sources and trustworthiness of information about the job opening. No significant differences for referral source were found across the two groups. A current employee of the facility was reported most often as the source of job information. Current employees were judged to be the most reliable sources of job information.

Discussion

Across both the hired and non-hired groups, attitudes toward the interview were generally positive. Although the results indicate that a significant number of individuals in this study have some reservations about the interview process, more than half the individuals in the

hired group rated the interview very positively.

Although the interview process was rated less favorably by those individuals not hired, that group tended also to rate the interview in a positive direction. This intergroup difference is to be expected but the tendency of the non-hired group to express a positive feeling towards the process indicates that this particular employing facility was doing a reasonable job with the previewing and the public relation's aspect of the interview process. Furthermore, neither the respondent's race nor sex significantly influenced attitudes toward the process, so it could be concluded that the process was handled adequately by this employer.

Results from the section of the questionnaire dealing with the source and credibility of job information supports a common belief among personnel managers: current employees are the best and most credible source of new employee recruiting.

Organizations do not presently have any viable alternatives to the selection interview. They can decrease the negative consequences of poorly implemented interview systems and enhance the positive benefits of interview previewing by means of periodic evaluation, in a fashion such as described in this study. Without collecting data relevant to the effects of the selection program, larger organizations with multiple hiring authorities cannot assess and correct the truly valid functions of the interview process.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that an organization can obtain useful information about its interview process by means of a post-interview questionnaire. Employers, such as the one assessed in this study, need to formulate more effective strategies to deal with interviewer compliance to organizational goals (e.g., good public relations, realistic previewing) and EEOC guidelines. Interviewer behavior, as a public relations sample of one, needs to be shaped and monitored. Finally, the results of this study support the belief that present employees are an underutilized recruiting resource and suggest that the informality of this extraorganizational recruiting be formalized and incorporated into current personnel policy.

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Table 1

Significant Peason r Item by Job Status

Item Number	Item Summary	Item Correlation
1	The interviewer was friendly.	.38*
3	The interviewer allowed enough time.	.41*
4	The interviewer enjoyed the interview.	.31*
5	The interviewer knew what he was doing.	.43*
6	The interviewer gave good and bad information.	.26**
7	The interviewer fully explained the job.	.26**
8	I would recommend working at this institution.	.29*
11	The interviewer asked important questions.	.37*
12	The interviewer showed interest in me.	.48*
18	The interview was well planned.	.36*
20	The interview was to short.	.36*
21	The interviewer was fair with me.	.38*
23	I could trust the interviewer.	.26**
25	The interview process could be improved.	.25**
28	More than one interview is needed.	.54*

Note. A postive correlation indicated that the hired individual rated items more favorably than the non-hired individual.
* $p < .01$
** $p < .05$

Table 2

Percentages of Individuals Asked Questions Not Related to the Job: Job Status, Race, and Sex

	Hired	%	n	Not Hired	%	n
Race	Black	50	18	Black	82	23
	White	74	19	White	81	11
Sex	Male	88	17	Male	83	12
	Female	75	20	Female	81	22
Race by Sex	Black Female	81	11	Black Female	83	12
	Black Male	00	7	Black Male	81	11
	White Female	80	10	White Female	80	10
	White Male	67	9	White Male	00	1

Total = 82% N = 58

Table 3

Frequency of Non-Job Related Interview Questions

Frequency	Question
3	1) Do you hire a baby-sitter?
11	2) Do you wish to be addressed as Mr., Mrs., or Ms.?
29	3) How many children do you have?
37	4) Are you single, married or divorced?
0	5) Do you have any overdue bills?
3	6) How tall are you?
3	7) How much do you weigh?
11	8) Have you ever been arrested?
34	9) Do you have any relatives working for similar organizations?
4	10) What clubs, social organizations, etc., do you belong to?
3	11) What kind of discharge did you get from the Armed Services?
2	12) What is your religious affiliation?
29	13) How old are you?
9	14) Where were you born?
0	15) Where were your parents born?
35	16) Who would you like to have notified in case of an emergency?
0	17) Do you have a reference from a pastor or minister?